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# **The Indignant Citizen: Anti-Austerity Movements in Southern Europe and the Anti-Oligarchic Reclaiming of Citizenship**

## **Abstract**

This article discusses the change in collective identity and political vision introduced by anti-austerity movements in Southern Europe in comparison with previous protest movements, and in particular the anti-globalisation movement and autonomist and anarchist activism. It focuses on the emergence of a discourse of citizenship that lies at the core of the new protest wave. It raises questions about the meaning of this “citizenism” and how it reflects contemporary conflicts and the dilemmas of post-crisis society. The analysis draws from analysis of movement documents, including manifestoes of protest organisations as Democracia Real Ya in Spain, and Real Democracy Now in Greece, and interviews with 40 protest organisers and participants from the Indignados movement and the Aganaktismenoi movement. I argue that references to citizenship reflect the anti-oligarchic framing of the 2011 anti-austerity protest wave and the view of citizenship as a right to political participation of “the many” against “the few”, which has been eroded under neoliberalism, and needs to be urgently regained to confront enemies shared in common by disparate social categories. This shift points to a break from the anti-statist attitude of autonomous and anarchism activism, and proposes the vision of a bottom-up reclaiming of state institutions by ordinary citizens, as the means to harness collective power to address growing social inequality. This turn highlights the pragmatic character of contemporary movements, it helps to understand why from the anti-austerity movements of 2011 new Left party surges, as Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece have emerged, and highlights the new opportunities of structural change and the dangers of assimilation that confront anti-austerity movements.

‘We want to be citizens, we want to take back our institutions.’ The words, uttered by Leonidas Martin, a Spanish activist at the ‘Global Uprisings’ conference held in Amsterdam on 15-16 November 2013, are intriguing in that they point to the development of an emergent discourse of citizenship at the heart of anti-austerity movements in Southern Europe since the explosion of the financial crisis in 2008. References to protesters as ‘citizens’ and appeals to the totality of the citizenry to mobilise against political and economic elites have abounded. In Spain, activists have often referred to the movement as a ‘citizen movement’, to

distinguish it from a ‘social movement’, and have often argued that the Indignados, also known as ‘15M movement’, have brought about a ‘new concept of citizenship’ (Aguilar, 2011). Some Spaniards have also talked of ‘ciudadanismo’ (citizenism) to describe the ideology of this protest wave (Delgado and Malet 2011). In Greece, the very name of the movement—‘Aganaktismenoi polites’ (indignant citizens) often shortened to ‘Aganaktismenoi’ (indignants)—explicitly identified protesters as ‘citizens’, and movement declarations often contained references to ‘citizens’ as the subject being mobilised. Further, the demands put forward by these movements have often used the language of citizenship, calling for more control on political institutions, through various forms of state-based direct democracy, such as referenda and new constitutions drafted by citizens.

What is the meaning of this discourse of citizenship? What does it tell us about the specificity of European anti-austerity movements and their differences from previous cycles of struggles? What is the political vision that accompanies this radical reclaiming of citizenship? And what does it tell us about contemporary political conflict?

In this article, I explore the emergence of citizenism - understood as the project of a popular reclaiming of citizenship - in anti-austerity movements in Spain and Greece, drawing on analysis of key movement documents, from the manifestos of protest organisations such as Democracia Real Ya (DRY) in Spain and Real Democracy Now (RDN) in Greece that have been leading these mobilisations; resolutions, and declarations of popular assemblies; and in particular, 40 in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with protest organisers and participants in these two countries. I discuss the reasons for this recuperation of the discourse of citizenship, and how it respectively illuminates the collective identities and demands raised by these movements. My main interest is to explain what citizenism can tell us about the specificity of this protest wave, in comparison with both the anti-globalisation protests around the turn of the millennium, and the social democratic tradition more generally.

My argument is that citizenism stems from a strategic response to the condition of social distress caused by the 2008 financial crash. Faced with a situation of generalised social discontent and the glaring unresponsiveness of state institutions and existing parties, activists have used the discourse of citizenship as a means to construct an inclusive ‘common ground’ for protest mobilisation: a ‘popular identity’ (Laclau 2005) that could interpellate the disparate demographics affected by austerity policies implemented by European governments. Furthermore, protesters have seen in citizenship a central demand unifying all

the disparate demands raised by participants in this protest wave. Starting from the diagnosis of the erosion of citizenship as the key factor enabling financial and political ‘oligarchies’ to pursue irresponsible economic policies, and then implement unpopular and anti-social austerity policies, Indignados and Aganaktismenoi have called for an extension of citizenship through new forms of state-based direct democracy, such as referenda and popular initiatives.

The rise of citizenism highlights how Southern European anti-austerity movements cannot be reduced only to neo-anarchist horizontal and prefigurative politics (Sitrin & Azzellini 2014), based on a rejection of the institutions of the state, and on the pursuit of alternative forms of democracy, for how this much neo-anarchist trend maintains an important influence. A key emerging concern for large sections of these movements has been the formulation of a more pragmatic and radical reformist strategy seeking a recuperation and extension of state institutions, and of associated rights and responsibilities, rather than a construction of ‘autonomous spaces’ totally outside of the State’s reach. By the same token, the vision of citizenship proposed by these movements is not the same as that of the social democratic project, notwithstanding some similarities in their shared reformist approach to the State. Where the social democratic project was fundamentally concerned with the material underpinnings of citizenship, citizenism understands citizenship as a culture of active political participation, without whose exercise unchecked oligarchic tendencies are bound to exacerbate economic inequalities.

The article begins by reviewing the debate on anti-austerity movements and on the idea of citizenship in the liberal, republican, and social democratic traditions. It then turns to an empirical analysis of the discourse of citizenship, as both a source of collective identity and the central demand of this protest cycle, identifying a number of key features of this discourse: its striving for inclusivity; its emphasis on political rather than economic conflict; its radical reformist rather than revolutionary orientation; its call for state-based direct democracy. It concludes with some remarks about the political and social implications as well as possible risks of the emergence of citizenism in anti-austerity movements.

### **Anti-austerity movements, citizenship, and the crisis of democracy**

In the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, deep social resentment against the restrictive monetary and fiscal policies imposed by national governments and EU institutions favoured the rise of an array of powerful anti-austerity movements (Castells 2012, Glasius and Pleyers 2013, Flesher Fominaya 2014, Della Porta 2014b). These anti-austerity mobilisations have

been most intense in Southern Europe, in particular in Spain and Greece, which witnessed the birth of two closely connected protest movements in May 2011: in Spain, the Indignados (indignants), or 15M movement, beginning with a massive protest on 15 May 2011, and soon turning into the peaceful occupation of Puerta del Sol in central Madrid, subsequently imitated by hundreds of occupations in other cities; in Greece, the Aganaktismenoi (indignants) movement, starting with the protests in Syntagma Square in central Athens on 27 May 2011, which sparked a similarly vast national mobilisation. Anti-austerity movements rapidly captured the public imagination, mobilising millions of people, and winning the support of the majority of public opinion in these countries (Gerbaudo, 2014).

The countries host to the Indignados and Aganaktismenoi, Spain and Greece, are among the countries hardest hit by the eurozone crisis, as testified by skyrocketing levels of unemployment, with youth joblessness reaching peaks of over 50%, forcing many young people to migrate abroad in search of employment (OECD 2014). Furthermore, the European sovereign debt crisis, which exploded in 2010, pushed these countries to the verge of bankruptcy, forcing the Greek and Spanish governments to accept the bail-out conditions set by the so-called 'Troika', composed of the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. This has led to severe conditionality in public spending and a politics of austerity that has severely affected welfare state provisions, calling into question basic social rights (Lapavistas 2012). This bleak picture of growing socio-economic distress is the background against which the Indignados and Aganaktismenoi movements have managed to construct such a vast popular mobilisation.

Existing scholarship about anti-austerity movements has mostly emphasised the elements of continuity with the wave of anti-globalisation protest, and in particular with autonomous movements, especially those pursuing non-violent tactics. For example, Azzellini and Sitrin (2014) have described Indignados and Aganaktismenoi as 'horizontal' and prefigurative movements. They have argued that their pursuit of direct democracy, through large assemblies in public space, opposes them to the representative, liberal democracy of state institutions. Similarly, Flesher Fominaya has demonstrated clear elements of continuity between the Spanish Indignados and Spanish autonomous movements (2014) that pursued an anti-statist politics of autonomy and construction of alternative spaces, (Katsiaficas 1997) and were highly influential in anti-globalisation mobilisations. The same can be said for the Aganaktismenoi movement, in that it reflects the inspiration of global

justice struggles and of local autonomous and anarchist movements (Sotirakopoulos & Sotiropoulos 2013).

Despite these connections with autonomous movements, Indignados and Aganaktismenoi have also introduced new political orientations that reflect the changing situation in which these movements operate, and the new subjective position it has ushered in. As I will demonstrate in the empirical section, central in the articulation of this orientation has been the grassroots reclaiming of the notion of citizenship, understood as the ‘basic structure of democracy’ (Kymlica & Norman 1994: 353), that - these movements contend - needs to be recuperated and expanded in order to address rising economic inequality.

In its most current sense, citizenship is a legal status connected with membership in a nation-state (Turner 1990). Citizenship traditionally comprises a number of fundamental rights—legal protection, the right to vote, to work, and to live in a country, and so on; as well as a series of responsibilities: to pay taxes, to obey the laws of the country, and to serve in the military, for example. As Balibar has argued this notion comprises two contradictory elements: on the one hand ‘it is bound to the existence of a state and therefore to the principle of public sovereignty’, and on the other ‘it is bound to the acknowledged exercise of an individual “capacity” to participate in political decisions’ (1988: 723). Citizenship in this sense is not just a legal status, but also a culture of participation in the polity (Balibar 1988). It is significant in this respect that in recent decades the idea of citizenship has been adopted by various social movements as a self-definition, in alternative to class-based identities that constituted the term of reference for the labour movement (Mouffe 1992, Cohen 1999, Verba, Scholzman & Brady 1995, Mouffe 2005, Cornwall & Coelho 2007).

In modern times the notion of citizenship has been mostly informed by three traditions: the liberal tradition, the civic-republican tradition (Kymlica & Norman 1994), and the subsequent social democratic tradition, initiated during the post-war period by the writings of T.H. Marshall (1950, 1964) with his influential theory of ‘social citizenship’.

The liberal theory of citizenship has emphasised the *individual autonomy of citizens* and the protection of their civil rights. This tradition understands citizens as bounded sovereign subjects, much in the same guise as nation-states (Mezzadra 2006). In this context, the state is assigned the limited role of impartial arbiter and guarantor of the rule of law, responsible for restraining individual citizens from impinging on the right and property of other citizens, and for guaranteeing basic freedoms. While sharing some elements with the

liberal tradition, the ‘civic-republican’ tradition, influenced by the writings of authors such as Machiavelli and Rousseau (see Kymlicka & Norman, 1994), is characterised by the more collectivist and communitarian vision of ‘political citizenship’. This concept emphasises not so much the individual autonomy of citizens, as is the case with liberals, but the *active participation of citizens in the public sphere*, the grassroots safeguarding of a healthy democracy and the rejection of all forms of tyranny and corruption (Machiavelli 1970).

With the exception of authors as Balibar (1988, 1991) and Poulantzas (1976), the Marxist Left has traditionally displayed a suspicion of the notion of citizenship, mostly seen as a bourgeois concept and an instrument of class domination (see for example Holloway 2004). It is in the social democratic stream of the Left that a more positive notion of citizenship has emerged. The most influential version of this emergent theory of citizenship was initiated by Marshall, whose notion of ‘social citizenship’ (1950, 1964) ranged from ‘the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society’ (1964: 71-72). This vision of citizenship emphasised the *material basis of citizenship*, the importance of access to public services, health, education and employment—such as those that accompanied the development of the post-war welfare state—as necessary conditions to enable nominal members of the nation-state to be actual citizens. Mass citizenship was thus a means through which class struggle had become institutionalised and pacified (Mann 1987, 351).

Contemporary protest movements operate in a context in which citizenship as a set of civil, political, and material rights – as it crystallised in the era of liberal-democracy and social democracy – appears increasingly in question. This is due to the present crisis of democratic legitimacy signalled by the widening gulf between citizens and representative institutions (Hayward 1995), rising political apathy (Norris 2011) and decreasing social and political affiliation (Putnam 2000). Various factors have intervened in this crisis. First, neoliberalism’s rise as a sort of ‘unique thought’ (*pensée unique*) for both the mainstream Left and Right (Touraine 2001) has led to what Crouch has described as a ‘post-democratic’ (2004) situation: important political decisions are progressively removed from public debate and appropriated by experts, lobbies, and the market. Second, this crisis is the product of the demise of social democratic consensus and the advance of neoliberal ideology, which has jeopardised the welfare state provisions that Marshall saw as a material basis of a real mass citizenship. Third, the crisis of citizenship is a result of the process of economic globalisation,

and the way in which it has weakened the nation-state, the traditional framework of citizenship in the modern era, moving many decisions to supranational institutions and multinational companies (Held 1999).

The perception of a crisis of citizenship has prompted a discussion about the possibility of new forms of citizenship, different from traditional ones both in terms of their scale (global or transnational instead of national citizenship), and the relationship between individuals and the state (citizenship as a bottom-up constitutive process rather than as a top-down legal status). On the issue of the relationship between individuals and the state, a number of authors have underlined the need to understand citizenship not just as formal legal status, but as a ‘culture of participation’ (Balibar 1986), a ‘bottom-up’, ‘active’ (Turner 1990), ‘insurgent’ (Holston 2008, 2009), and ‘constituent’ process, through which new rights and new institutions are progressively created. On the issue of scale, scholars as Balibar (2009), Sassen (2002), and Hardt and Negri (2000) have questioned the necessity of the association between citizenship and the nation-state associated with both the liberal and republican traditions. The idea of global citizenship has been very influential among anti-globalisation activists, who have been animated by a strongly cosmopolitan vision (Della Porta & Mosca 2005).

As it will be demonstrated in the course of the empirical discussion, contemporary movements bear the mark of the post-democratic crisis of citizenship, and the bottom-up view of citizenship as a dynamic and ‘constituent’ process. The main novelty of anti-austerity movements consists in their putting forward of what will be described as *an anti-oligarchic view of citizenship* that revolves around the populist aim of uniting the dispersed citizenry to confront the concentrated and entrenched power of economic and political elites, and of creating new forms of state-based direct democracy to extend popular participation in political decisions.

## **Methodology**

The article stems from a research project on the ‘movements of the squares’ of 2011-13, in Egypt, Tunisia, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Brazil, the US and the UK, which lasted for 4 years and during which a total of 130 interviews with protest organisers and participants were collected. The research aimed to provide a global interpretation of the political culture of the protest wave of 2011 in a number of countries around the world. My aim was to develop a



cultural analysis of protest movements (Johnston and Klandermans 1995), identifying the overarching themes and attitudes that underpin the 2011 anti-austerity movements, and their elements of difference vis-à-vis previous protest waves.

My methodological approach in this paper follows the gist of the ‘European tradition’ of social movement theory in authors such as Touraine and Melucci and their view of social movements as bearers of certain meanings, worldviews, and values that, on the one hand, reflect these movements’ position in a given historical period, and, on the other hand, can have an impact on ‘historicity’, on the historical direction of society (Touraine 1977: 388). I focus on that level of analysis that Melucci describes as ‘the perceptions, representations and values of actors regarding their own actions’ (Melucci, 1996: 384), as distinct from observations of protest behaviour and quantitative analysis of collective events as pursued by scholars such as Tilly.

I approach the Indignados and Aganaktismenoi, as a common unit of analysis, manifestations of a common transnational movement. This choice is justified by a) the strong similarity in the grievances raised by these movements (economic crisis, poverty, cuts to public spending, political corruption); b) their contemporaneity and mutual declarations of solidarity; c) their commonality in discourse and protest practices; d) their similarity in social composition. As we will appreciate, there are also important internal differences in the *degree* of adoption of a discourse of citizenship, which will be examined by comparing and contrasting these two movements. Anti-austerity movements will be analysed in comparison with the anti-globalisation protests around the turn of the millennium, which constitute the most important predecessor of anti-austerity movements because of a) the presence of common activists in both movements; and b) the strong cultural influence of the anti-globalisation movement on contemporary practices.

In order to explore protest discourse I adopt a mixed qualitative method using two main sources of data: a) a selection of 20 movement documents and b) 40 interviews with activists and participants (25 in Spain and 15 in Greece). The adoption of this mixed methods approach derives from the attempt to develop a nuanced understanding of protest culture, which might take into account not just the official discourse put forward by protest movements (as expressed in key documents), but the rationale and motivations behind it (as gathered through in-depth interviews).

Archival analysis of documents has been widely utilised in political and social movement research (e.g. Burnham 2004: 156-188, Johnston 2002). For this paper a collection of documents was selected through an extensive review of the websites of protest

organisations, and web archives of the resolutions of popular assemblies (see for example,). The final dataset included a total of 20 documents including manifestos and declarations produced by the main protest organisations, in particular DRY and RDN, and declarations and resolutions of popular assemblies in the capital cities.

Official movement documents are an important source to explore protest discourse, since that is where the movement's purpose, aims, and demands are spelled out most explicitly. They are the result of long, collective, and often painstaking discussions in which different ideas are presented and some synthesis is achieved, in line with the principles of consensus democracy that underpins contemporary protest movements. Therefore, they can be seen as a fairly reliable representation of the collective 'consensus' within a given movement at a given time.

Compared with movement documents, interviews are more personal and self-reflexive data-sources that provide the researcher the opportunity to investigate the underlying motivations behind the transformation of protest culture. They provide a more subjective and personal viewpoint on movement culture, as seen from the eyes of the protagonists (Blee and Taylor 2002, Della Porta 2014b: 210). In the case of my research I utilised in-depth and semi-structured interviews to explore the motivations and experience of organisers and participants. A grounded theory approach was adopted, with the theme of citizenship emerging organically from the interviews rather than being prompted at the start.

Interviewees were recruited through both prior selection of key figures, identification of influential activists doing visits to protest camps, and 'snowball sampling' (Bienacki & Waldorf 1981), with an eye for balance in terms of gender, age, and political background, with 15 interviews conducted in Greece and 25 in Spain. Around half of the interviewees were organisers, and the other half were from protest participants. This recruitment process aimed to gather a sample of the activist community of these movements and explore their views about the movement's meaning. It cannot be claimed that this is a perfectly representative sample of these movement organisers and participants. Yet, it constitutes a balanced and diverse picture of these movements, covering a variety of sections, organisations and demographics. Furthermore, the credibility of these data rests on the fact that interviewees were recruited after a process of familiarisation with the movement and its various networks and groups, and that the findings were verified by comparing and contrasting them with the findings emerging from document analysis, and public declarations. Interviews were conducted by the author, either *in situ*, i.e. in protest camps or

in the city in which they were politically active, or by phone. They lasted one hour on average and were transcribed by the author.

The analysis and interpretation of research data followed an open-coding procedure (Strauss & Corbin 1997), with basic units identified during the first round of analysis and then organised in larger categories, and eventually around the emergent narrative of a radical reclaiming of citizenship as the dominant discourse of this protest wave.

### **In search of a lost citizenship**

The discourse of citizenship developed in the Indignados and Aganaktismenoi movements will be analysed at two interconnected levels: as 1) *collective identity*, which revolves around the adoption of the subject-position of the citizen as the foundation of a ‘popular identity’ that aims to encompass disparate social demographics affected by the economic crisis; and as 2) *central demand*, which organises various claims for civil, political, and material rights brought to the fore by protesters, around the project of reassertion of the rights of the dispersed citizens against the oligarchic tendencies of contemporary society.

#### ***Citizenship as a source of collective identity***

“Citizen movements”, “citizenry movements”, “indignant citizens”: these and similar expressions utilised by activists to describe anti-austerity movements in Greece and Spain are a reflection of the way in which the notion of citizenship has served as a source of collective identification. Aitor Tinoco, a 28-year-old 15M activist in Barcelona, describes the Indignados as a ‘citizens’ movement, while he qualifies the anti-globalisation movement as a ‘social movement’ (September 2011, phone interview). Yannis, a 34 year-old Greek activist, argues that ‘this was not a movement of the Left, but a movement of ordinary citizens’ (June 2014, phone interview). In the same manner, Nikos, a 32 year-old Greek activist, argues that ‘the general impression was that we are the people, we are *citizens*, we are the working people living in this country, and we have to unite together.’ This discourse of citizenship can be analysed as a means of constructing an inclusive ‘popular identity’ (Laclau 2005), appealing to diverse demographics affected by the economic crisis and by austerity policies. In this context, the idea of citizenship, and the perception of its loss is utilised as a common ground, around which people of different social and political backgrounds, affected by a common sense of victimhood vis-à-vis economic and political elites, can find a common space of collective identification.

One of the most remarkable aspects of both the Greek and Spanish anti-austerity movements has indeed been the extent to which they have managed to mobilise a broad constituency encompassing older people, people with lower incomes and/or levels of education than the typical left-wing protester (see, for example, Della Porta 2014). Such a unifying role of the subject of the citizen is unambiguous in the Spanish context, where the discourse of citizenship has been often used to mark an explicit break from previous protest waves and their tendency towards self-ghettoisation. Fabio Gandara, a 27 year-old activist in Madrid, argues that DRY was a movement open to all citizens, rather than only to activists.

It was a citizen's call that had no one behind. It wanted to be a completely non-partisan and non-union, and just like something *coming out of the citizenry itself*. I think that was one thing that made people identify themselves with it more quickly. There was an attempt to avoid all divisive and exclusive language and ideas. I think that was what excited people: this idea of true *citizen unity*. (October 2011, phone interview, emphasis mine)

Aitor argues that in adopting a discourse of citizenship, the Indignados managed to encompass very different social sectors, in addition to people belonging to countercultures and the activist community:

There are all sorts of people: unemployed, freelance workers, precarious workers, primary education teachers and healthcare workers. In these movements, there are also many designers working in the private sector, or hackers and other types of technicians. It is very varied. We also have people from 60 to 70 years something I had never seen it [in protest movements]. (September 2011, phone interview)

This broadening of the base of support of protest movements has been informed by the desire to mobilise all the people victimised by economic and political oligarchies, the ‘entirety of the citizenry and many people who had never taken part in a protest’, in the words of 37-year-old Barcelona-based activist Javier Toret, a member of DRY (January 2013, phone interview).

In Greece, references to citizens and the citizenry were present in the name of the movement ‘indignant citizens’, and were deployed in a similar way to express the inclusivity of the movement, with its effort to encompass all the ‘workers, unemployed, retirees, youth, who have come to Syntagma to fight and give a struggle for our lives and our future’, as

asserted by a declaration of the assembly of Syntagma Square. Yannis contrasts the anti-globalisation movement and the movement of Syntagma Square by asserting that while the former was a ‘movement of the Left’, the latter was ‘a movement not of the Left or Right, but a spontaneous movement of society’:

The people did not know the left and political vocabulary. They did not know the protest, and how to organise the movement. The second characteristic was that it was a mass movement. The scale of participation was not what we were used to know. It was something very big, and you had to work in a different way. No groups participated as such in the movement. Only *individual citizens* were allowed to participate. (June 2014 , phone interview)

Similarly, Anastasia, a 29-year-old Greek protester, connected with the left-wing party. Anastasia explains that the protests were very different from the usual Left protest:

There were also many middle age men, many retired people, unemployed men, it was all the social groups that I can imagine but from what I can recall right now, my mother and father who never came to a protest wanted to be there. It could be anyone that wanted to be right there. They were not afraid that they would participate in something political. People at the time thought that everyone could express themselves. (June 2014, phone interview)

What united them was, as Anastasia goes on to explain, the fact ‘that they felt they had nothing left to lose’, and that ‘they wanted to discuss politics which they could not do until that point, because ordinary people did not have chance to speak’.

The disparate demographics mobilised by this protest wave found in the idea of citizenship and the subject of the citizen a ‘common ground’ for overcoming their differences and divisions. Thus, the existence of formal or *de jure* citizenship rights, and the perception of their *de facto* erosion in the context of a ‘post-democratic’ neoliberal society and the economic crisis, came to constitute the source for an inclusive collective identity, capable of uniting all the disparate constituencies appealed to by these catch-all movements as well as the grievances affecting them: unemployment for some, indebtedness and foreclosures for others, precarious working conditions, cuts to public services and loss in purchasing power for others.

The focus on the idea of citizenship as a source of identification carries important consequences for the content of the popular identity adopted by these movements. First, the discourse of citizenship implies a political more than economic framing of the conflict waged by protesters. Second, citizenship acts more as a lack than as a presence; it is conceived of as something that is missing, and that needs to be taken back. Third, the discourse of citizenship positions protest movements in a radical reformist rather than revolutionary position.

The centrality of citizenship in movement discourse points to the political rather than economic framing of the conflict waged by anti-austerity movements. This aspect can be understood by comparing and contrasting the notion of the citizen with other 'subject positions' (Foucault, 2005) traditionally adopted by social movements: the subject position of the worker, which has dominated the history of the labour movement, and of the consumer, which has been key to the history of the environmental movement, as well as in protest campaigns against the unethical practices of multinational corporations. The worker subject is associated with a materialist logic of class interest, with a demand for higher salaries and better working conditions; the consumer subject is mainly associated with moral considerations and ethical and health concerns, resistance to environmental destruction and to sweatshop labour practices operated by multinational corporations such as Monsanto, McDonald's, or Nike, particularly by the anti-globalisation movement. Both subject positions are located in the economic field, in the sphere of production and consumption, respectively. In contrast, the citizen subject is positioned wholly within the political field and mobilised on political motivations, because of dissatisfaction with the way in which the state is governed.

According to Christos Giovannopoulos, a member of the Solidarity for All Network in Greece:

if the anti-globalisation movement mainly highlighted the issue of the economy, 2011 highlighted the issue of democracy. This is the level of the political struggle and not of the economic struggle. Because people have realized that nothing will change if the same people continue being in power. (July 2015 , interview, Athens)

By adopting the position of the citizen, economic issues such as the effects of the economic crisis and of austerity policies are not framed as purely economic phenomena, but rather read from a political standpoint as the result of political decisions that reflect the contempt of political elites towards ordinary citizens and their subservience to financial power. Economic

destitution is linked back to the political disenfranchisement that is understood as its root cause.

This political framing of citizenism entails not so much the abandonment but the transcendence of the framework of class struggle that has been dominant in radical Left movements. What is prioritised here is a political struggle for the re-establishment of the rights of individual citizens, vis-à-vis the concentrated power of the elites.

The subject of the citizen provides protesters with a 'negative identity', one that stems from a sense of lack, to use a metaphor from the psychology of Jacques Lacan: the perception not of having something in common, but of *lacking something in common*, as it were, as a consequence of the evacuation of citizenship's legal and material substance in post-democratic times. The figure of the citizen is framed not as the possessor of a series of rights, but as a subject that is aggrieved precisely in her deprivation of those rights that qualify her as a citizen. In Greece, one of the most popular slogans thematised the sense of civic disenfranchisement by denouncing 'I vote, You vote, He votes, She votes, We vote, You vote, They steal'. In a similar vein, the first resolution of the Syntagma assembly on 27 May 2011 asserted that 'for a long time decisions have been made for us, without consulting us', a reference to many unpopular decisions made by Greek politicians immediately prior to the protests, including prime minister George Papandreou's signing of two unpopular *memoranda* with the Troika to secure financial assistance to deal with the sovereign debt crisis.

A common element across the experience of protest participants has indeed been the perception that 'you are not being treated well by the system, that your rights are not being respected', as suggested by Nikos, a Greek activist (December 2014, phone interview). This sense of victimhood and betrayal is well represented by the manifesto of DRY, which proclaims:

Democracy belongs to the people (demos = people, krátos = government) which means that government is made of every one of us. However, in Spain most of the political class does not even listen to us. Politicians should be bringing our voice to the institutions, facilitating the political participation of citizens through direct channels that provide the greatest benefit to the wider society, not to get rich and prosper at our expense, attending only to the dictatorship of major economic powers.<sup>1</sup>

The manifesto goes on to say that ‘[c]itizens are the gears of a machine designed to enrich a minority which does not regard our needs. We are anonymous, but without us none of this would exist, because we move the world’. Another Indignados slogan asked ‘¿Por qué mandan los mercados si yo no los he votado? No a la dictadura financier.’ (Why do the markets rule, since I have not voted for them? No to financial dictatorship). Citizenship is thus not conceived of as a pre-established bundle of rights and duties, as it is usually understood in liberal discourse, but rather as a sort of phantom notion; something that has been lost, due to the oligarchic transformation of contemporary society, and something that needs to be regained as a key step in reasserting the power of ‘the many’ over the arrogance of political and economic elites.

This political framing also involves the abandonment of the strong antagonistic and anti-statist position of autonomous movements and their view of the state as the root of oppression. Leonidas Martin, a 40 year-old Spanish activist with a long history of activism harking back to the beginning of the anti-globalisation movement, argues that:

before [at the time of the anti-globalisation movement] we wanted to destroy the system. Now we realise that we only have this system, these institutions and that we need to protect them for the good of society. We are not against the system. Rich people are those against the system. We are those who want to mend the system.  
(September 2014; phone interview)

Similarly, Javier Toret proposes that ‘this is not the old idea of moving away from the State, but rather let’s engage with it and let’s try to shape it’ (January 2013; phone interview). Adopting this radical reformist position, anti-austerity movements have put forward a number of demands for a new citizenship, and in particular for new forms of state-based direct democracy that might enable the strengthening of popular participation in political decision-making.

### ***Citizenship as a central demand***

The discourse of citizenship in anti-austerity movements is far from being just a mourning of lost citizenship or a conservative demand for a simple restoration of citizenship rights as they were established in previous political eras. It also contains a more forward-looking and positive content: a demand for a better citizenship, one that might embody the new forms of



social experience of contemporary society, and the demand for direct democracy that has constituted one of the hallmarks of this protest wave.

The content of the new citizenship demanded by the movement of the squares can be seen in the resolutions and declarations of popular assemblies, which have themselves been ‘citizens’ parliaments’ of sorts, as expressed by Spanish activist Vicente Martin (27 May 2011, interview, Barcelona). Contrary to popular perception, these movements did formulate a series of substantive demands for the reform of state institutions that largely revolves around the restoration and expansion of citizens’ rights. These demands should not be understood as a petition to existing policy-makers and political leaders, but more as a sort of wish-list compiled by these movements. Christos Giovannopoulos goes on to explain:

[previous] social movements were usually asking for specific demands, while the movements of the squares said those who are responsible for this situation have to pay for what they have done, and then we will take care of pushing our demands. (July 2015, interview, Athens)

But what is exactly the content of the new citizenship demanded by protesters? The demand for new citizenship rights has been most explicitly articulated in Spain, where some sections of the movement have been particularly adamant about the need to abandon the countercultural anti-statist postures of previous protest waves. DRY adopted a ‘transversal document’<sup>2</sup> that included a series of political demands for ‘civic freedoms and participatory democracy’:

1. No internet control. Abolish the Sinde Law.
2. Protection of freedom of information and investigative journalism.
3. Mandatory and binding referendums to the profound questions that change the lives of citizens.
4. Referenda required for any introduction of measures taken by the European Union.
5. Changing the Electoral Law to ensure a truly representative and proportional system that does not discriminate against any political force or social will, where blank ballots and invalid ballots also have their representation in the legislature.

6. Independence of the Judiciary: reform of the prosecution system to ensure its independence; no to the appointment of members of the Constitutional Court and the General Council of the Judiciary by the Executive.
7. Establishment of effective mechanisms to ensure internal democracy in political parties.

Similar requests for new citizenship and democratic rights were contained among the 16 proposals approved by the popular assembly of Puerta del Sol on 20 May 2011.<sup>3</sup> These included:

1. Change in the electoral law to have open lists of candidates
2. Participatory and direct democracy where citizens can take an active part
3. Effective separation of executive, legislative and judicial branches.

What is common across these various demands is the intention to reassert and extend the power of ordinary citizens in their relationship with the State by securing their freedom to communicate and be informed; and by eliminating political interferences in the legal process; by providing them with instruments of participatory and direct democracy. Across these specific demands the most important one is the request for state-based forms of direct democracy, such as referenda, that have often been proposed by populist movements in their criticism of representative democracy (Surel and Meny, 2002), as a means to give substance to the idea of popular sovereignty. Significantly, the electoral manifesto of Podemos in the 2015 Spanish elections encompassed this demand for direct democracy, promising new mechanisms of citizen participation and new forms of “citizen democracy”, as part of its five “constitutional guarantees”<sup>4</sup>.

In Greece, there was not such an explicit and systematic demand for new citizenship rights as in Spain. This is a reflection of the lesser strength of citizenship discourse in the country, which can be read as a reflection of the comparative strength of anarchist activism in Greece. The idea of ‘real democracy’, as it was introduced by Spanish activists and adopted in Greece by RDN, was criticised by certain sectors of the movement and contrasted with the more radical and anarchist idea of ‘direct democracy’ (Άμεση δημοκρατία). This was explained by Dimitris, a 24 year-old Greek activist, as follows:

Direct democracy wants people to decide their future. Not that politicians so decide, you have to find the answers to your problems. Or you have to become like a kind of political when people self-organize. That's the main difference between us and them. Real democracy (as they call the Spanish) can be even democracy with political parties, parliament and all these things. (June 2011, interview, Athens)

As suggested by Dimitris, Greek activists were more skeptical than their Spanish counterparts about the possibility of bottom-up state reform. Nevertheless, in the case of the Aganaktismenoi it is possible to identify a number of demands for new civil and political citizenship rights. For example, on 27 May 2011, the first day of protest in Syntagma Square, the website of Real Democracy Greece, the Greek counterpart to DRY, published a number of proposals for discussion, which closely resembled those discussed in Spain. These included several demands for citizenship rights, including:

1. Using referenda on significant issues
2. Free internet without state control
3. Promoting the rule of law and freedom
4. Greater popular participation in internal and foreign policy decisions.<sup>5</sup>

This 'citizenist' orientation was also seen in several declarations of the popular assembly of Syntagma Square, which similarly advanced citizenship-related demands, including calls for the protection of citizens from police violence, and proposals for a rewriting of the constitution 'by citizens instead of politicians'. Significantly, some of these demands went on to inform the Thessaloniki programme of the party Syriza, which promised 'transforming the political system to deepen democracy' in a way that closely resonates with the demands for bottom-up democracy put forward by the Aganaktismenoi.<sup>6</sup>

Besides demands for civil and political rights, economic demands were also often couched in the language of citizenship. DRY's first manifesto listed as part of its vision of a real democracy a number of social and economic demands, including 'the right to housing, employment, culture, health, education, political participation, free personal development, and consumer rights for a healthy and happy life'. Furthermore, the second point in the proposals approved by the Puerta del Sol assembly of 20 May 2011 included housing among

the ‘basic and fundamental rights contained in the Constitution’, calling for ‘a reform of the Mortgage Act and the public allocation of property in case of default’, ‘public, free and universal healthcare’ and a ‘strengthening of public and secular education’.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, one of the declarations of the popular assembly of Syntagma Square demanded ‘dignity in our work without the constant terror of unemployment’ and proclaimed ‘free public health and education are the inalienable rights of everyone’.<sup>8</sup> A further manifestation of this tendency can be seen in the discussion that developed within these movements on the so-called ‘citizens’ wage’, a system that would provide all citizens a basic income to live on, with debates about whether it should be unconditional or means-tested.<sup>9</sup> Thus also economic demands have been framed in the language of citizenship and presented as inalienable rights guaranteed by the country’s constitution, testifying to the way in which citizenship has become a central organising principle for claim-making.

### **Reclaiming democracy from the ground up: anti-oligarchic citizenship**

For anti-austerity movements in Southern Europe citizenship has become, in a way, both the problem of and the solution to the situation of social emergency they have confronted in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crash. Protesters have called for a re-appropriation of citizenship precisely because they felt themselves to be ‘aggrieved citizens’, because they perceived that they were not citizens anymore, since citizenship rights had been taken away from them by economic and political elites. They have diagnosed the loss of citizenship to be the element that has facilitated the oligarchic onslaught on ordinary people’s social and economic welfare. In this context, citizenship has become both a source for an inclusive collective identity, appealing to different sectors of the population, and a unifying demand, connecting various social and economic grievances with the overarching vision of a recuperation and expansion of democratic rights from below.

What we see at play in these movements is what we could describe as an *anti-oligarchic* view of citizenship – different from the liberal, republican, and social views of citizenship - one which sees in the recuperation of citizenship, not just the bottom-up reconstruction of a crisis-ridden democracy, but also a reassertion of the power of the dispersed citizenry against the concentrated power of economic and political elites, who are accused of having hi-jacked and emptied out the institution of popular sovereignty. The radical discourse of citizenship thus contains what could be described as a democratic populist element, that frames the contemporary conflict as one between the citizenry and the

oligarchy, and sees the solution to the present predicament in a reintegration of 'aggrieved citizens' within state institutions, from the municipal to the national level, seen as the only available means to reassert collective control on the economy and society.

This orientation points to a clear departure from the position of the autonomous movements that were a key component of anti-globalisation mobilisations around the turn of the millennium. Autonomous movements saw the state as a necessarily evil apparatus at the exclusive service of capital and criticised the Leninist ambition of taking the state (Holloway 2002). While indeed both Indignados and more so the Aganaktismenoi embody some libertarian elements of autonomous and anarchist ideology, especially in their more militant ranks, they have also encompassed radical reformist demands of a democratisation of the state from below, that do not fit with the tradition of autonomous movements. Rather than the autonomous movements' strategy of anti-statism and counter-power, anti-austerity movements in Spain and Greece have proposed a strategy of radical intervention in the state. They have taken heed of Nicos Poulantzas' invitation to abandon the desire 'to place oneself at any cost outside the State in the thought that one is thereby situated outside power' (Poulantzas 1976: 153). Following this inspiration they have called for an 'opening up' or 'hacking' of the state, reclaiming it as a structure serving the individual members of the political community, rather than political elites and their business allies. This position has been seen in demands for new institutions of popular participation including referenda, electronic voting and constitutional processes that might close the gap between citizens and decision-making.

This 'citizenism' of anti-austerity movements bears some similarities to the social democratic tradition, with its reformist approach to the state, and its view of citizenship as a strategic element. Similarly to social democrats, anti-austerity protesters have abandoned the radical anti-capitalist postures of previous protest movements, adopting a more pragmatic hope of transforming the State and capitalism for the better, rather than doing away with them. Moreover, there is some resonance between Marshall's discussion of 'social citizenship', and the emphasis of anti-austerity movements on the material underpinnings of citizenship, as most clearly seen in the debate over the citizens' basic income and various social provisions connected to citizenship, discussed in popular assemblies. However, what is at play here is not a revival of the social democratic project but an altogether new political vision. First, this protest wave is informed by a profound criticism of social democracy and its failures. Activists have vehemently denounced how the neoliberal onslaught has undermined the welfare state, making the social view of citizenship increasingly untenable,

and have accused social democratic parties of being complicit with neoliberalism. Second, the view of citizenship proposed by anti-austerity movements is different from the social view of citizenship adopted by social democrats. Social democrats mostly focused on the economic aspect of citizenship, highlighting the fact that this legal status had to be accompanied by material provisions in order to be real. Contemporary protesters have instead emphasised the political dimension of citizenship, arguing that no economic advancement can be obtained unless citizenship is reasserted, and the power of the dispersed citizenry can rebalance the concentrated power of economic and political elites.

This anti-oligarchic and populist view of citizenship proposes a different view of the state and of the relationship to citizens than is the case within both the social democratic tradition and autonomous movements. Anti-austerity movements conceive of citizenship as a paradoxical process, in a way that resonates with Balibar's assertion that 'the citizen can be simultaneously considered as the constitutive element of the State and as the actor of a revolution' (1991: 54), and to Rancière's view of democracy as the constant struggle against oligarchic tendencies in society (2007). In this context, protesters do not position themselves 'within the State' as was the case with social democracy, which made the conquest of the state its ultimate aim, or wholly 'outside and against the state' as proposed by autonomous protesters. Rather, protesters see themselves at the same time 'within and without' (*afuera y adentro*) to use an expression coined by Spanish activists, or rather 'below the State', as testified in the frequent reference in Spanish to those below against those above (*abajo contra aware*). In other words, protesters are aware of their connection and subjection to the State apparatus, yet they are determined to intervene in it and transform it in a bottom-up direction.

The mission of anti-austerity movements can thus be described as an 'opening up' of the state, the attempt to making institutions responsive to those citizens they are supposed to represent, but that too often feel betrayed by their representatives. Thus citizenism does not propose a form of counter-power, but rather a form of 'under-power' so to speak, one that is cognizant of its subjection to state institutions, yet intent on resisting, opposing, and transforming them. Some might take this reformist position to be an abandonment of the radical principles of previous protest movements, and their hope of doing away with capitalism and the state. This criticism has been mostly levelled against *ciudadanismo* in the Spanish context, particularly by more militant activists attacking what they saw as a turn towards ineffective reformism. While this observation is partly true, in that it is undeniable that citizenism aims to reform the system rather than an outright revolution, it is important to understand this turn as the result of the pragmatic outlook of these movements, and the way

in which their confronting a situation of social emergency has prompted them to look for viable short and mid-term solutions, rather than grand-standing revolutionary plans.

The turn towards citizenism goes a long way towards explaining the connection between Indignados and Aganaktismenoi and the rise of new or renewed political parties such as Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece, and municipal initiatives such as Ahora Madrid and Barcelona en Comú. Anti-austerity mobilisations have been instrumental in the electoral success of these formations, and they have contributed in making the restoration and expansion of citizenship rights a key component of their platforms. This has been seen when looking at the way in which both Podemos and Syriza integrated plans for ‘democratic deepening’ and new citizenship rights in their political programme. These developments highlight the possibility that some of the new anti-oligarchic views of citizenship might soon be matched with new institutions of state-based direct democracy. However, as most glaringly seen in the case of Syriza and its capitulation to the European Council on debt relief, the institutionalisation of anti-austerity movements and its connection with political parties also raises serious political dilemmas, ones that are already familiar from previous protest waves (e.g. Brand 1999). A radical engagement with the State should however not mean abandoning a role of criticism and contestation from civil society towards the state and political parties. It is important that protest movements guard against the risks of co-optation that accompanies all phases of movement institutionalisation, and that new forms of counter-power are constructed to match the new situation.

The view of citizenship proposed by Southern European anti-austerity movements does not entertain the shift from a national to a global citizenship, as it had been envisaged by anti-globalisation activists, but remains firmly within the framework of national citizenship. As we have seen, many of the demands for new citizenship rights are actually claims about restoring national sovereignty, as is the case for the Indignados call for referenda on laws imposed by the European Union, or the Greek proposal for rewriting the national constitution. This focus on a national rather than global framework of citizenship has allowed anti-austerity movements to recuperate a scale of action that focuses at a level where it’s easier to build political leverage. But it undoubtedly raises a risk of national retrenchment, with possible negative consequences for the efficacy that social movements have in facing transnational power structures (Gerbaudo and Pianta, 2014).

Despite these risks, it is apparent that the radical reclaiming of the notion of citizenship has constituted a propitious turn for anti-austerity movements. This trend has not engulfed the entirety of these movements, with many activists still clinging to a more anti-

statist worldview, but it can be safely argued that it has constituted a dominant or consensus position for these movements, also given its presence in movement documents. This discourse has allowed protesters to interpellate a diverse constituency and construct a strong political grounding to fight against the financial crisis and austerity politics and work towards the construction of the kind of participatory and egalitarian society that is very much needed in the aftermath of the Great Recession. Future research will need to establish if this constitutes a long-term trend or a more passing one, reflecting the transitional character of the present political conjuncture.

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